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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002132

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: MALIKI-BARZANI MEETING: AN ICEBREAKER

REF: BAGHDAD 2032

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Gary Grappo for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The long awaited meeting between Prime Minister Maliki and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Barzani took place on August 2 and resulted in agreement to establish a joint GOI-KRG team to address contentious Arab-Kurd issues. KRG insiders tell us Maliki agreed to integrate two Peshmerga brigades into the Iraqi Army (IA), the implementation of which will be on the joint team's first agenda. While the meeting was touted as an effort toward national reconciliation and unity, Maliki's more immediate objective for the visit appears to have been to explore the possibility of bringing back a Shia-Kurd alliance for national elections. With the KRG elections out of the way, the political dating game has begun for national elections and we should expect to see Iraq's political leadership furiously vying for each others' support. KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani will lead a KRG delegation to Baghdad on August 14 for follow-on discussions. Baghdad 2124 reports Maliki's comments regarding his meeting with Barzani. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On August 2, PM Maliki traveled to Talabani's retreat in Lake Dokhan to meet with KRG President Masoud Barzani. It was the first time Maliki traveled to Kurdistan to meet with the KRG leadership. It was also the first meeting between Maliki and Barzani since October 2008. Talabani warmly greeted Maliki upon arrival. Throngs of press were present to witness Barzani welcoming Maliki at the retreat. Deputy PM's Advisor Araz Rahman told Poloff participation was strictly limited in order to guarantee a frank discussion. Barzani was joined by President Talabani, DPM Barham Salih, GOI FM Hoshiyar Zebari, KRG VP Kosrat Rasoul Ali, KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani, KRG Minister of External Affairs Falah Mustafa, KRG COS Fuad Hussein Advisors Rowsch Shaways, and Fakri Kareem. Maliki was joined by Sadiq Al-Rikabi, with other aides waiting outside.

¶3. (C) KRG Chief of Staff Fuad Hussein told Poloff August 3 the meeting was "all talk about how to talk to each other." Fuad relayed that Barzani told Maliki that he had lost Barzani's trust and would need to take concrete steps to regain it (reftel). Deputy PM's Aide Soran Jalal Aziz said that the five-hour meeting was "fiery with lots of shouting" behind thick doors. FM Zebari told Pol M/C August 5 said the meeting was a "positive ice breaker that needed to happen."

¶4. (C) DPM Barham Salih told Emboffs on August 4 that the meeting was less about national unity, and more about Kurd-Shia relations and how the leaders could support each other for national elections. Barham asserted that Talabani sees Kurdish interests best served by a Kurd-Shia alliance and is prepared to back Maliki. He added that Maliki is hedging his bets on alliances and there is a risk he may seek to further escalate Arab-Kurd tensions in order to win votes.

He claimed that Barzani continues to distrust Maliki but has agreed to give him another chance.

15. (C) Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Parliamentarian Friad Rwanuzi told PolOff on August 5 that in an effort to gain Barzani's trust, Maliki agreed to integrate two Peshmerga brigades (15th and 16th) into the Iraqi Army, which would qualify them to receive salary and training at GOI expense. Rwanuzi added that he released this information to the press to "keep Maliki honest." He added that there were Qthe press to "keep Maliki honest." He added that there were topical discussions about hydrocarbon legislation (revenue-sharing portion) and how to break the impasse on the Mosul Provincial Council. However, Barham pointed out that Mosul is not a Sunni Arab-Kurd issue but more a Barzani Kurd - Zebari Kurd issue. The powerful Zebari tribe dominates Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) politics in Mosul. Barham said Barzani would have to tread carefully when considering replacing KDP players (Keshro Goran and Serbat Terwanishi) on the ground.

16. (C) COMMENT: The Maliki-Barzani meeting could set the framework for GOI-KRG dialogue to resolve Arab-Kurd issues, re-forge trust between Maliki and Barzani, and in turn reduce Arab-Kurd tensions. At the same time, it is also apparent that movement on contentious issues must be viewed through the lens of national elections. The Embassy will continue to press both parties for progress, including in the UNAMI DIBs process, in the next few months leading up to the elections.
END COMMENT.
HILL